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JEWS OF JERUSALEM

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THE JEWS OF JERUSALEM.

SPEECH of SIR JOHN GRAY HILL at the Opening
of the Palestine Exhibition in Liverpool, 4th
June 1912.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Your Chairman has referred to my experience and that of my wife in the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Well, for 25 years in succession we have spent all our holidays in that most fascinating Country. We have ridden over it in camping tours, not merely from Dan to Beersheba, but from the Valley of Moses—from Petra the rock cut City of Edom, one of the most extraordinary and wonderful places in the World of which it was written :—

“ Match we such wonders save in Eastern clime ?

A rose red City half as old as time.”

from Petra I say we have ridden far East of the Jordan, through Kir of Moab, where Mesha the Shepherd King of Moab sacrificed his son to Chemosh, Rabbath Moab, across the great gorge of the River Arnon, the boundary of the Kingdoms of Og, King of Bashan, and Sihon, King of the Amorites, Baal Meon, Rabbath Ammon, Gadda, Ramoth Gilead, through the giant Cities of Bashan and other Old Testament sites up to Damascus (many times visited by us), Baalbek Palmyra (“ Tadmor in the Wilderness ”) to Hamah (“ the entrance of Hamath ”), Homs

and Aleppo. We have visited in the neighbourhood of Aleppo those strangely interesting but rarely visited early Christian cities built in indestructible material which, overthrown by the Mahomedan invasion, remain almost intact to the present day, but void and empty of inhabitants except for a few wandering shepherds. In one of them, Kalat Siman or the Castle of Simeon, the celebrated anchorite, St. Simeon Stylites, is said to have lived for 37 years on the top of a pillar 60 feet high, which broken in sections lies upon the ground in the Church erected to his memory.

On the Western Coast we have journeyed from the Suez Canal through the Little Desert ("by the way of the Philistines") through Gaza, Ascalon, Ashdod, Jaffa, Caesarea, Mount Carmel and Tyre (the Liverpool of the Old World), Sidon, Beyrout, Gebal, Tripoli, Latakia, Mons Cassius, the Orontes, and Antioch. We have ascended the Yarmuk River, ridden along the Jordan on both banks from its source to where it falls into the Dead Sea, and followed the Jabbok from its rise at Rabbath Ammon to its junction with the Jordan. From West to East we have crossed the Country at many points reaching to a considerable distance to the East of the Haj or Mahomedan Pilgrimage road, and visiting some places that no one else has seen. We have had some strange adventures. We have been shot at, had bullets through our tent at night, been arrested, harassed, threatened, bullied and robbed. We have travelled amongst the Bedouin tribes, the Druses and the Nusairiyeh. So I think we may say that we know the country and the country people.

With regard to Jerusalem, more than 20 years ago we bought a bit of land on the Mount of Olives, on the highest point in the hills which stand about Jerusalem, and there we built a house, and we have passed part of our time, and recently (as we are getting too old for adventures) all our holidays there, and we only returned from our beloved home to this dripping June of England last Saturday, so that I think we know something of Jerusalem and its people also. From our house we have, I think, the most glorious view in the world. On the one side we look down upon the Holy City and the great area where the Temple once stood, and the beautiful Mosque of Omar, built, no doubt, out of the remains of the Temple, now stands. We also see the Church of the Sepulchre. On the other side we see spread before us the Wilderness of Judea, which descends to the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea, 4000 feet below us (for we are 2700 feet above the Mediterranean, and the Dead Sea, which generally shows like one entire sapphire in the brilliant sunshine, is 1300 feet below it) and the Mountains of Moab, with their great gorges and purple shadows. And to the North we see many of the Old Testament villages, Rama, Mizpah, Michmash and others. Thus we look upon ground which attracts the greatest of human interest and the widest of human sympathies. If then, we are enthusiastic about the Holy Land, you will understand why.

Now Jerusalem is the Holy City of three great religions, especially of two, the Jewish and the Christian. With regard to the Mahomedan it comes in third in their estimation, Mecca and Medina preceding. But the Temple area where the Mosques now stand, and the

Temple once stood, the Haram esh Sherif, or Noble Sanctuary, is an object of special veneration to all three religions. Cruelly and unjustly the Jews are not allowed to enter that area. The Christians are allowed to enter on application to their Consuls which means entrance on payment, but the poor Jews are kept wailing at the bottom of the great retaining wall of that sacred enclosure. This is an injustice which I trust will some day be removed.

Amongst these great religions there are strong bonds of union as well as wide barriers of difference. All professors of them believe in the "Father of all in every age in every clime adored." All of them believe in what Matthew Arnold calls "The not ourselves which makes for righteousness." All of them believe in the spirit of self sacrifice which is the salt of all religions. All of them believe in the greatness of idealism as compared with the miserable realism of "this ignorant present," in which so many of us pass our lives, caring for naught but meat, drink, and amusement. The Old Testament is as sacred a book to the Christian as to the Jew, nor is it entirely neglected by the Mahomedans, because they venerate the Prophets and Poets of that great book, although they consider it and the New Testament to be superseded by the Koran. What do you find in Jerusalem? That the adherents of these great religions who ought to live in peace and amity, each worshipping according to his faith in the Holy City, live in bitter religious animosity. A common expression in the Arabic language addressed from the holder of one belief to the holder of another is "Curse your religion." It is a horrible expression, but it is in common use, indicating a common bigotry of thought.

The Mahomedans are bitter against the Jews as well as the Christians, perhaps more bitter. Treated as they are many of the Jews, although they are very poor, quiet and patient, must in their hearts utter "curses not loud but deep" upon those who treat them with harshness and contumely. The Eastern Christian Churches are not more friendly towards the Jews, who are not allowed to enter even the Court of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. I am glad to be able to say however that the British and American Christian Churches, Catholic and non-Catholic, Episcopal, non-Episcopal and Nonconformist, adopt an entirely different tone towards the Jews of Jerusalem. They are friendly and sympathetic. They may be judicious or injudicious in other respects in their dealings with them, I am not entering into that question, but they are kindly in their intention and in their acts, and friendliness and kindness can do very much in that country.

Your Chairman has alluded to the fact that my wife and myself try to do something to help the poor people, and the response we get from the peasants is often very gratifying. A little story will show you how religious bitterness may be softened by such treatment. There was an old Mahomedan sheik in a village situated 500 feet below our hill to whom we got very much attached. He was a dear old man, and used often, squatting in the Eastern fashion on the floor, to tell us most interesting stories of his life as a soldier and as peasant, but his regard for us troubled him greatly in his religious convictions as to our future fate. The Mahomedans, or at any rate the peasants near Jerusalem, believe that at the last day an immensely long hair will be stretched

across from the Mount of Olives over the Valley of Jehoshaphat to the Temple area, and that all the souls that were or are, will be obliged to walk across this hair, and only those who manage to reach the other side will enter into the joys of Paradise. While the Mahomedans will get across quite easily, the Jews and Christians will inevitably fall into the pit, and be consumed by fire. The old man was a very pious Mahomedan, holding this belief most firmly. But after long and painful reflection he one day said to his friend, our head servant (who has served us faithfully for over 20 years), "I know that all Christians and Jews must go to hell, but I do believe that some how or other the Prophet Mahomet will manage to get that Lady and Gentleman (meaning my wife and myself) across that hair to the other side." And many a village quarrel has been referred to our house and happily ended with the help of our faithful head servant, by the elders, after the consumption of much coffee and many cigarettes, kissing each other's beards and vowing eternal peace. Instead of the rough aggressive and suspicious attitude which the peasants adopted towards us when we first came to the country, they now treat us with great civility and respect. When my wife arrives (as she usually does before me) they leave their work in the field to run and kiss her hand and bid her welcome, and we have a sad leave taking from many humble friends. The like treatment would produce the same result in persons of other religions. The Christians who, when we first came, were duly received with sour looks when they wandered in solitude near our land are now treated with civility, and the Jews who scarcely ever came there, have within the last year or two passed freely.

There is no census in Turkey, but the population of Jerusalem is now estimated at 68,000 ; 10,000 Mahomedans, 8000 Christians and 50,000 Jews. The Jews are increasing rapidly, especially those coming from Russia and Poland, driven out by ill-treatment at home. These are for the most part, very naturally from their long endured suffering, poor in physique and contracted in mind. " These are they which came out of great tribulation."

This is a great effort you are making to improve their condition and enlarge their minds. Formerly the rich Jews came to Jerusalem to die. Now the poor Jews come to Jerusalem to live. It is pathetic to see opposite the Noble Sanctuary in which the Temple once stood, the ground occupied by Jewish Cemeteries, as if the dead could see. They ought to have been occupied by houses from which the living Jews could look upon the Noble Sanctuary from which they are excluded.

I think this new spirit which is arising is of a most important character. Why continue to wail at the foot of the Noble Sanctuary ? Why should these poor Jews confine themselves in ghetto like places and occupy themselves solely or at all with lamentation and woe ? Why not begin a new life of manliness ? The schemes of the Bezalel School, and of the Evelina de Rothschild School are excellent. But why not, whilst heartily supporting these enterprises and enlarging them, go beyond them also and colonise and cultivate the soil in a much larger scale than is done at present ? The Evelina School has 500 girls in it. I very often ride to Jerusalem, and on my way pass by the School, and I often see girls as happy

and bright looking as you could wish, exercising in the pretty garden of the establishment, and rejoice to see them. Nothing could be better than such an Institution except a larger one on the same basis. The Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts under the able and enthusiastic management of Professor Schatz employs 450 men. Women and children are employed doing excellent work of an artistic character. You see the beautiful carpets, stuffs and metal objects made by them around you. There are a good many clever Jewish artisans in Jerusalem. I have often had repairs done by them, and they have done their work faithfully and honestly, but of course there is no opportunity, for ordinary artisans as such, to create the beautiful things which proceed from the Bezalel School. I earnestly wish success to that School; but I think as I have said you ought to go beyond this, and encourage much more fully the cultivation of the soil. There are already many Jewish colonies in several parts of Palestine where you see beautiful plantations of oranges, vines and fig trees, but there is very little of that kind of thing around Jerusalem. Inside the walls of the Holy City the poor Jews are crowded together in narrow, dirty and unsanitary conditions, and outside the walls, and although in the North-West suburb there are many nice Jewish houses with gardens, yet in the New North Jewish suburb, buildings are being erected which are simply ghettos. They are putting up long rows of barrack like buildings facing each other across a narrow street in such a way that the people can see nothing but the rooms opposite to them and can only "look sadly in each other's faces." They are erected, I believe, by the Russian Jews. This ought to be stopped.

How is any man's mind to develop in such places, cut off as he is from the light? The Book of Ecclesiastes says, "Truly the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." How can you behold the sun if you are lodged in a narrow street with tall houses on each side of you? The Psalms tell us that "The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handy work.". How can you see the moon and stars in such places as these?

What you want is a great Garden City such as that close at hand to us at Port Sunlight. The great requirements are the planting of trees and plants, the recovering of old cisterns and the making of new ones. The vine, the fig, the almond and the olive will grow everywhere. The olive is of slow growth, but the fig and the vine grow fast and can be planted with the greatest facility. Cut off a branch in the spring, stick it in the ground, and it will grow. It does not require watering, but is the better for ploughing round it once a year. A great fig forest might cover the best part of the wilderness of Judea, if the goats were kept away, which could be done by shepherd boys, and it would give food for the whole country. Grapes are so cheap that you can buy as much as a donkey can carry for between 3 and 4 shillings, but they do not keep. The raisins of Ramoth Gilead (Es Salt) are however celebrated, and excellent, and very cheap wine is made in several Jewish Colonies. Fuel is very much wanted in Jerusalem for cooking, and in the winter to give warmth. The woods of Gilead, which used to be very extensive, are being cut down to supply fuel, and I know of no effort to replace them. But even they are several days' journey distant,

and the carriage on camel and donkey back costs something. The peasants are cutting down their fine olive trees, and olives are a very valuable article of food in Palestine, because of the heavy taxation of them, and the country is getting still more denuded of trees than it was 20 years ago.

We have found pine trees a good thing to plant for fuel, and have planted a great many and continue to plant them every year. As they grow up you thin them out, and the wood, because of the resin in it, makes excellent fuel.

The soil is fertile. All that is wanted is water. There is only one spring about Jerusalem, which is called the Virgins' Fountain, and is situated in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. This spring is conducted to the pool of Siloam, by an underground channel, believed to have been made by King Hezekiah when he feared the invasion of Sennacherib. ("Why should the Kings of Assyria come and find much water"?) But there are plenty of old cisterns round and near the City, which simply want cleaning out, and generally speaking repairing. One huge bottle-shaped one, about a mile from our house, we helped the peasants to clear out. It took four men 98 days to accomplish the task; only 4 could work because of the narrow mouth, and as it was cut in the hard rock it wanted no cementing or repair. I found it to be circular in shape, 56 feet deep by 45 feet in-diameter, so that it would hold an enormous amount of water. It had been cut by them of old time in this hard rock which was surrounded by soft rock, so the old artificers had found out the right place, and

it was so situated that it filled with one winter's rain. Now the villagers to which it was awarded after an arbitration which we arranged with a " Holy Man " from across Jordan, as umpire, are well supplied, yet for generations they had fought with the inhabitants of another village for the right to the cistern, and I remember one very ancient man telling us with a chuckle how he had in his youth killed one of the opposing party upon the mouth of it.

Our place is called Ras Abou Kharoub, which means the head or eminence of the father of Kahroub trees. There was not a kharoub tree or a tree or plant of any kind whatever standing on the ground when we came to the place, but we have planted vigorously and continuously and have now many thousands of trees of various kind, vines and other plants and flowers flourishing on our land. The Jews have more enterprise than the Mahomedans and might do much more than they are doing round Jerusalem in planting, restoring the water supply and cultivating the soil. They might make a beautiful Garden City in the suburbs if they would only take the trouble to do so, and the necessary monetary assistance were forthcoming.

There is plenty of rainfall. The rainfall of Jerusalem is only a few inches less than that of London. But the water runs away. You have only to impound it. There was not a cistern visible on our land when we bought it. We knew that there must be old cisterns hidden underground because every army which has besieged Jerusalem (and it has been besieged some 20 times) must have occupied these heights and have required large quantities

of water. Accordingly, we searched and found several very large ones, which we enlarged and improved and covered in, and we have now six very large ones holding about 800,000 gallons of water, which gives ample for all purposes and enable us to give water to the poor peasants in the dry season.

There is one other point I wish to mention. Something ought to be done by the rich Jewish communities in England and other countries to beautify Jerusalem. The Christians have done a good deal in that way. The Greek Church has erected, and is still erecting, imposing buildings. The Anglican Church have built a large and imposing church and collegiate buildings in the suburbs with subsidiary buildings of considerable architectural merit. The French Roman Catholics have erected several buildings, large if not all beautiful. On the mount of Olives the French and Russians long ago erected great buildings devoted to religious purposes. The German Emperor, with his wonderful enterprise and enthusiasm, has recently caused four very large and imposing German buildings to be erected in and about Jerusalem, a large Protestant Church within the City, a great and massive Roman Catholic Church outside the walls to the South, a great Roman Catholic Hospice outside the Damascus Gate, and the fourth, a Protestant Hospice, near our house on the Mount of Olives, the latter a very large and imposing erection and beautifully decorated within. Round this latter, extensive planting has been made, and is being continued. Part of the very large piece of land surrounding it consisted of a bed of flint, and this has been cleared away at great expense simply for the purpose of planting.

I believe also that before long there is going to be a fine building erected by the Freemasons of the Lodge of King Solomon's Temple (our neighbour, Sir Wm. Lever, of Garden City celebrity, is interested in the matter), and this I hope will be of a character to still further beautify the city or its suburbs. I read from time to time in the English newspapers of the Knights of Jerusalem, as an English order. Why have they no building in the city which gives them their name ? ⁽¹⁾

But the Jews have not erected any fine building for Jerusalem, either within or without the walls. Would it not be a creditable thing for them to do so ?

The fact is that a sufficient number of rich Jews do not visit Palestine. That grand old man, Sir Moses Montefiore, went there many years ago and did great work for his co-religionists, but who goes now ? I am sure any rich European or American Jew going there now would be greatly interested, and might be moved to do something in the direction I suggest. But I can do no more than suggest. I hope I have offended no one in what I have said. I have thought it best to speak out my real thoughts frankly. I am but an onlooker. I am not of your race or your faith, but I have a sincere sympathy with your aspirations and I know the great difficulties under which the Jews labour in Palestine. I have moreover looked on for 25 years, and lookers on they say see most of the game. I may be in error upon some points, but at least I see some of it. And this I strongly

(1) I unfortunately forgot the great work done by the Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in connection with the British Ophthalmic Hospital, which does more good to the poor of all classes and religions than any other institution in the Holy City.

believe, that the new spirit which is awakening amongst you, and which it is the object of this Exhibition to foster, will ultimately lead to a new, a happier and a nobler existence for the Jews in the Holy Land, that the night of bondage and misery is far spent, and the day of freedom and happiness is at hand.

I have much pleasure in declaring this Exhibition open

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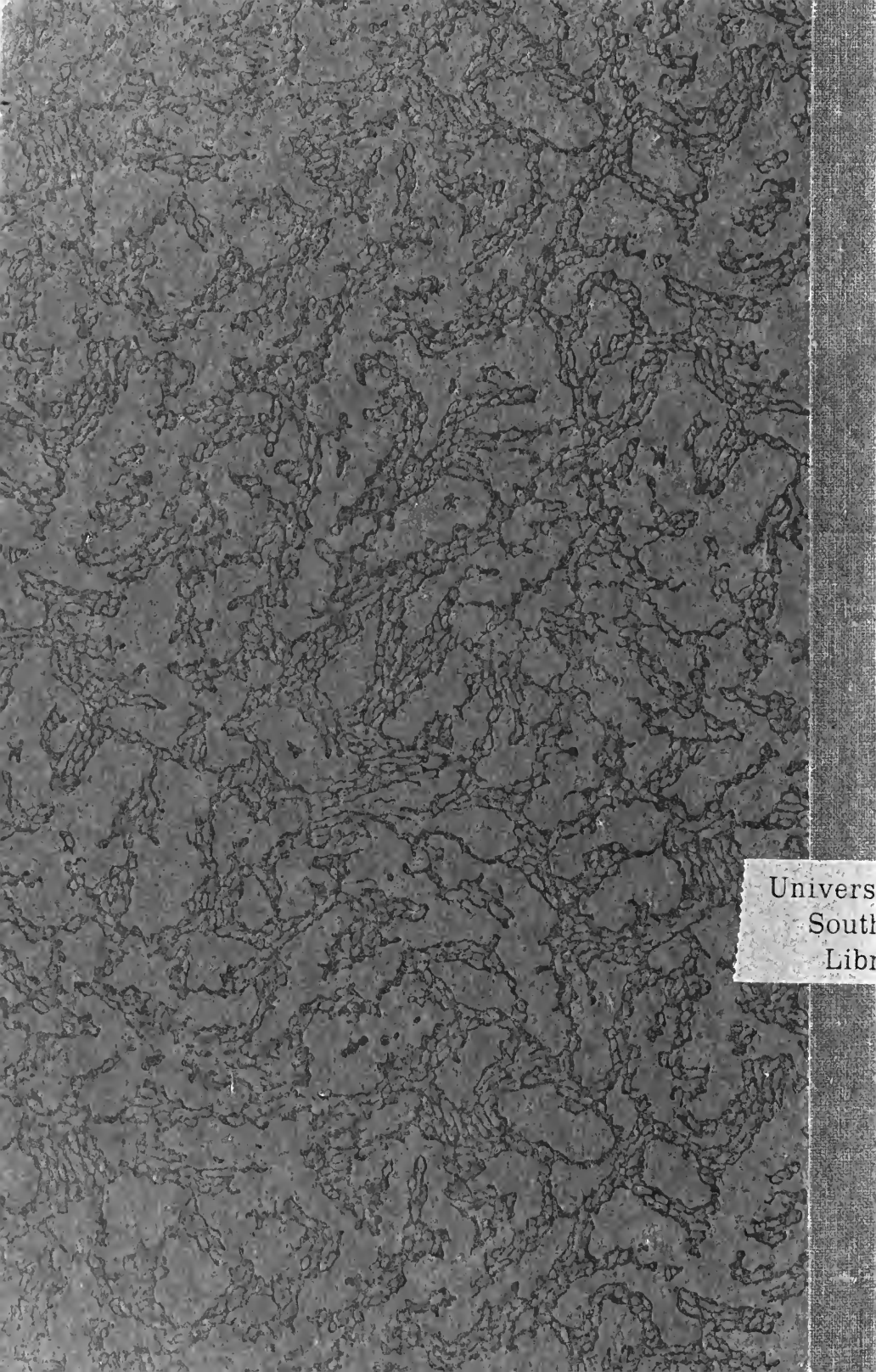
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